

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
LAURINBURG
METHODIST CHURCH

By
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1872 - 1942

REV. HIRAM K. KING, Pastor

LAURINBURG, N. C.

1942

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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF LAURINBURG METHODIST CHURCH

(By Maxcy L. John)

Prior to the year eighteen thirty-five, Methodism in organized form was not known in that portion of North Carolina extending from near Fayetteville to the state line bordering what is now Scotland County on the south. There was one Baptist Church, Spring Hill, ten miles north of Laurinburg, and one Presbyterian Church, Laurel Hill, four miles north of Laurinburg. From Laurinburg to Fayetteville, there were several churches, all Presbyterian, in Robeson, Hoke and Cumberland Counties, but no Methodist Church until we reach Fayetteville.

However, Methodist itinerant preachers traveled this way occasionally, and wherever they went there was sure to be some preaching somewhere along the way. It is definitely known from his journal that Bishop Asbury preached betimes, and even held a session of the South Carolina Annual Conference, A. D., 1814, in Fayetteville, and that he also preached at Beauty Spot Church, near Tatum, on the Fayetteville and Bennettsville road which passes by Caledonia Church. It is not definitely known that the good bishop preached at Caledonia, but others did stop there and hold services at Thompson's blacksmith shop, which stood on what later became property of Caledonia Church, some fifty yards N. E. of the community building now on church property. Neill Thompson owned a farm and blacksmith shop and sold out to his neighbor, Roderick McRae, who sold from that farm four acres (for \$8.00) to the "Governors, Overseers, Managers, Trustees & Directors over a certain Episcopal Methodist Church erected and established . . . at the Thompson Place" stating that the land had been purchased from Neill Thompson and that the spring on the land was named Thompson. The deed bears no date, but it was probated the first Monday in January, 1836, before the County Court in Rockingham, and recorded in Book "O" (owe), page 418.

The land was surveyed by John McD. Shaw, County Surveyor, and, as was his custom, the deed drawn and witnessed by him, and another; but careful investigation has failed to find any information as to the other witness, or the trustees, named in the deed. John McD. Shaw was the grandfather of Mrs. Neill McN. Smith, Mrs. John F. McNair, senior, Mr. D. C. Lytch, and others. Mrs. Smith, born Flora Lytch, was a member of this church until her death. The grantor, Roderick McRae, was the

grandfather of J. T. John, M. L. John and Dr. Peter John, members of this church. He was a Scotch Highlander brought over by his parents at the age of four, and settled near Caledonia.

As late as 1871 there were distinct evidences of the old blacksmith forge remaining on the land, and the old log church, then falling down, was still on the land. It had evidences of a chimney on the south end, but this is to be accounted for by the fact that for some years before the war of 1861-65 it had been used for school purposes. Heating facilities in a church of that day did not exist in this section,—being considered soft, if not sinful indulgence. The fact that the deed was evidently taken in the latter part of 1835, and at the time of its execution there was on the land a “church and a spring,” is taken as proof that the church was in existence as a Methodist organization before the close of the year 1835.

The Methodists of Laurinburg are very rightfully interested in the history of Caledonia Church, as it is clearly the parent church, and a study of its early history is pertinent to the subject under discussion. Ten prominent members of Caledonia came to Laurinburg, among its charter members.

Allen McCorquodale, a native of Argyllshire, Scotland, a member of the South Carolina Conference, was assigned to Bennettsville circuit, which embraced Caledonia Church, in this state. He was the first pastor of Caledonia, and because of his great love for his native Caledonian Hills, he immediately re-named Thompson Place Methodist Episcopal Church,—Caledonia M. E. Church. Rev. Mr. McCorquodale often preached in Gaelic, and the surrounding Scots came for miles to hear the gospel in their native tongue.

Caledonia was promoted and organized by Methodists from South Carolina, and as all this section of the state was at that time within the confines of the South Carolina Annual Conference, Bennettsville Circuit supplied the pastors for the church, through the year 1872.

Little is known of the early history of Caledonia Church. A new church, a frame building, was erected across the road from the log church some time in the early fifties of the last century, on a five acre gift lot, and stood in what is now the edge of the cemetery at Caledonia, about forty feet west from the church building erected in 1881, and which latter building is still in use,—and, incidentally one of the most beautiful country churches in this section. In 1881 the old building was sold to the colored Methodists at Johns, and now stands beside the road just north of the creek at Johns.

In order to know the history and environment of Laurinburg Church it is necessary to look further into the situation and gather the history of Caledonia Church.

South Carolina Methodists seem to have been more progressive, or more possessive, or both, if we are to judge by the fact that South Carolina organized Methodism in the southern tier of counties of North Carolina, and even penetrated into the state so efficiently that their interests on this side of the state line drew the South Carolina Methodist Annual Conference to Fayetteville, being the twenty-eighth session of the same. It was held in 1814 in Fayetteville, presided over by Bishop Asbury. And this is not all. Other sessions were held in this state from time to time, extending through 1867. Three sessions of the South Carolina Conference were held in Wilmington, three in Fayetteville, one in Wadesboro, three in Charlotte, one in Lincoln-ton, one in Morganton,—in 1867,—and being the last of the twelve sessions held in North Carolina. From this record it is fully manifest that the State of South Carolina held all the southern tier of counties, crossing to the Blue Ridge mountains and almost to the center of the state, as it reached Burke County, half way across to Virginia, from the South Carolina line.

Then came the Conference in Cheraw, S. C., in 1869, which was the last session of the South Carolina Conference in which the North Carolina territory representatives sat as members. Before the next session met in Charleston, in 1870, all the territory in North Carolina, excepting Caledonia and Saint Johns Churches, had been taken over by the North Carolina Conference. To understand what that really meant it will be necessary to cite the statistics in part of the 1869, and the 1870 sessions of the South Carolina Conference, and compare them. In 1869 there were reported for the whole joint territory as members of the South Carolina Conference, 42,926 white members, and 26,884 colored members. At conference next year in Charleston, S. C., 1870, being restricted to territory in South Carolina, statistics reported only 32,371 white members, and 1334 colored members:—a drop in white membership of 10,555 lost to the North Carolina Conference. The colored had reduced rapidly and by 1878 they disappeared from the record entirely. (For further statistics, see—"Early Methodism in the Carolinas," A. M. Creitzberg, D. D., 1897.)

It may surprise some of the younger people that the colored members were in such numbers. All Southern Protestant denominations carried colored members on their church rolls until the close of the war in 1865, or longer. But few of this day are prepared for the disclosure that in 1860 there were 9,839

more colored members than there were white members, or really almost ten thousand more negroes than white members the last session held before the war between the states.

The transfer already mentioned, took effect in 1870, as stated, and at the Conference in 1870 the North Carolina Conference organized that unoccupied territory southwest of Fayetteville already referred to, throwing a large circuit together, known as Cumberland Circuit, extending from near the city of Fayetteville to the bounds of the Caledonia and Saint Johns congregations, almost on the South Carolina line, being only about five miles and two miles distant respectively, from the state line. These churches had not yet been transferred, as had they been dismissed in 1870 to the North Carolina Conference, which had not yet taken over effectively, these churches would have been orphans, as there were no other churches near enough to group with these two rather weak churches to form a pastorate, and they could not support a pastorate between themselves. They must wait until North Carolina could organize and move up to them.

At the 1870 conference the Cumberland Circuit was arranged, having no churches, so large it was necessary to preach on week days at some of the appointments; so poor that its income had to be supplemented from the Home Mission Fund; and the hardest to serve and the least pay,—to which it became the custom to appoint young men in the first year of their ministry; and, because of that, and other reasons, it was facetiously called "The Calf Pasture."

The year 1871 found Rev. Hiram P. Cole riding the range hunting for Methodists and those with Methodist inclinations, and even mavericks having no brand as yet. It was his duty to corral them and get them herded together where he could preach to them. He came to Laurinburg and found a few Methodists from other sections had come to Laurinburg to live, and also found ten members of Caledonia congregation living in and near the village, unincorporated, that was to become, two years later, the incorporated town of Laurinburg. He arranged for preaching once per month in the Laurinburg Masonic Hall; but the Presbyterians generously and cordially invited him and his congregation to worship in the Presbyterian Church the Sundays they had no preaching. The invitation was gratefully accepted, and there began then a cordial relation between the two churches that continues to this day.

Mr. Cole was relieved of his arduous duties at the close of 1871 and another young preacher, Rev. R. F. Bumpas, a first year man, was assigned to Cumberland Circuit. He preached

here regularly once a month and held several services at Caledonia, possibly having in view the ten members of Caledonia whose membership at Laurinburg was desired, and that they should come, gladly, and their coming cause no friction, having in mind that a congregational split is sometimes more than a mere split,—a church feud, almost, in some cases, and not confined to any branch of the church, either. No man could have been better fitted to secure the desired results, than Mr. Bumpas. At any rate, before the year 1872 was over, Mr. Bumpas had organized a new church at Laurinburg, with the ten members from Caledonia among the charter members of Laurinburg.

At the conference in 1872 Mr. Bumpas could report that there was a new church that could be grouped with Caledonia and Saint Johns to form a pastorate, a condition that had been awaited for the past two years, so that those two churches could be taken off the Bennettsville Circuit and joined with Laurinburg to form a circuit of the North Carolina Conference.

Rev. Thomas W. Guthrie was appointed the first pastor of the new circuit, the Laurinburg Circuit. He served four years as its pastor, of Laurinburg, Caledonia and Saint Johns.

And now that Laurinburg has gotten started, the rest of its history is not so exciting.

As preaching was continued in the Presbyterian Church, it was not until 1874 that plans for a new church building in Laurinburg got well under way. But finally there was a plain church building of the prevailing type, oblong, with no ornament, but neat, dignified, painted white, a satisfactory auditorium, a vestibule with a gallery over it, plain home made seats and pulpit; but all well done and satisfactory.

A few years later one very cold day when Sunday services, never short in that day, were seemingly longer than usual and the congregation suffered greatly from cold feet, on coming out of the church Mr. A. F. Bizzell said in a loud carrying voice that if his frozen feet did not drop off he would see that a stove was put in the church by next Sunday, if he had to foot the bill alone. He met with response and made good his promise to put a stove in the church,—and everybody happy.

Some months later the same Mr. Bizzell became interested in getting an organ for the church, and offered to get up the necessary funds if the official board did not object, and install an organ. He was successful, and so Laurinburg had both these improvements before any other church in the community had either, and without that friction many of the others had in making such improvements.

It was only a year or so before Mr. J. A. Parker, who owned a lumber yard and planing mill, announced if the congregation would buy a church bell he would build a suitable steeple and would ask no one for more than one dollar contribution. The bell was bought and Mr. Parker made good, building a neat steeple over the front door of the church and joined to it, with the lower part open so as to form a porch before the door of the church. This was the first church bell in the county.

For something like two decades the church functioned without change, gradually growing in strength and membership. But then came a demand for renovation of the church, and it was completely overhauled under the direction and supervision of the ladies of the church, with stained glass in place of clear glass in the windows, an enlarged recess behind the pulpit, with a choir loft behind the pulpit, accommodating the small organ of that day and the choir. It was now thought that this new and partly modernized building would serve for many years; but not so. Disaster was brewing. The hand of an incendiary reached forth in the dead of night in October, 1893, and all that was the church lay in ashes to greet the members when they came to their places of business next morning. Two residences had gone up in midnight flames shortly before, and the continued incendiarism struck terror to some and aroused a determination to ferret out the miscreant. Detectives were employed and after some weeks the incendiary confessed and was sentenced to prison.

Almost before the congregation could confer in any number the Baptists extended an urgent invitation to the Methodists to use their church in every way, even the pool if wanted, and it was even suggested that the Methodists not hurry to build, as the Baptist church was without a pastor, and had even discussed the possibility of abandoning their organization, the membership was so small and the outlook unpromising. But wise counsel of W. G. Quakenbush had prevailed, and they had decided to hold the organization intact, meet and have Sunday school each Sunday and take up a collection for a fund to be held against the time when they would call another pastor. They urged that the church be used by the Methodists indefinitely, or at least for some time. The two congregations have always had the best of friendly relations, but this experience more thoroughly cemented the two in fellowship.

However there must come a time when visitors take their departure, and the congregation went about planning for rebuilding on the old church lot at the head of Roper Street. A plan was selected conforming to the prevailing change in style of church architecture, and the new church had the usual number

of gables and corners with a steeple on one corner. The building was completed, and again it was thought it would be a long time before any change would be made.

Along about 1912 there began agitation for a new church building, with ample Sunday school space. Some were for getting another location where they hoped there would be less ringing of bells on Sunday and less trash blown from the business section on the church lawn. Most of the sentiment seemed to be in favor of a basement Sunday school auditorium and rooms, while at least one asked why, with so much open space, should a hole be dug in the ground in which to teach Sunday school children, and urged there be no extensive basement, and warned if there was to be a basement at the proposed new location, corner of Main and Church streets, there would be water in it, and probably as much or more noise than at the old location. This was all held in abeyance until 1916 when it was decided to go to the new location and plans for building were rapidly prepared and the building started early in the year 1916. The church was rather slowly constructed, partly because of war time conditions that hampered and delayed construction. However, it was raised and fully enclosed and covered before fall. However, little boys did go swimming in the basement that summer before the building was completed, though this has been overcome now.

Financing the building was rather slow, so it was decided to sell the old church and lot, and use the proceeds in finishing the building.

The completed building cost approximately \$65,000 and the organ \$4,000. The children of Mr. and Mrs. A. P. Gibson gave a set of chimes in memory of their parents. Mr. and Mrs. A. F. Blue gave a baptismal fount in memory of their little daughter, Elsie. Miss Alice Covington presented the brass hand railing at the entrances in memory of her father, Mr. R. R. Covington. The family of Dr. J. W. North gave a pulpit Bible and hymnal in memory of their father. Mr. J. A. Jones, then a member of the building committee, presented the pulpit furniture.

When the debt had been liquidated Rev. R. F. Bumpas, who had served two pastorates and was greatly beloved and admired by all, was invited to return and dedicate the church building which had been begun while he was serving his last pastorate here. He returned, and on May 2, 1920, dedicated the church. Mr. Bumpas referred feelingly to his work here in organizing the church in 1872 and again his four-year pastorate 1914 to 1917 inclusive and his delight at seeing the new building started in 1916 while he was pastor.

Sons of the church who have entered the ministry, are:

Rev. Evan D. Cameron, who went to Texas, then Oklahoma, and transferred to the Baptist Church ministry. He is now dead.

Rev. J. D. Bundy, now superannuate in Fayetteville, N. C.

Rev. L. S. Ethridge, deceased.

Rev. H. M. North, D. D., deceased.

Rev. W. V. McRae, Fayetteville, and now District Superintendent of the district.

None of the above has served Laurinburg as pastor. Rev. H. M. North, D. D., has served this district as Presiding Elder. Mr. Bundy served on other districts.

No pastor has died in the pastorate, and no pastor has resigned.

We have had twenty-six pastorates beginning with 1871, before actual official organization, and including today, served by twenty-five ministers, as Mr. Bumpas served twice. The average length of pastorate has been a little less than two and three-quarter years.

The conference year in the North Carolina Conference has usually begun about December 1st, each year. The list of ministers who have served the congregation in Laurinburg beginning with 1870, when this part of North Carolina was taken over by the North Carolina Conference, is as follows:

Name of Minister	No Years	Years in Service
Hiram P. Cole	1	1870-71
R. F. Bumpas	1	1871-72
Thomas W. Guthrie	4	1872-76
Baxter C. Phillips	3	1876-79
John W. North, D. D.	4	1879-83
Daniel May	1	1883-84
B. B. Culbreth	1	1884-85
J. T. Lyon	4	1885-89
W. B. Doub	2	1889-91
R. J. Moorman	2	1891-93
J. O. Guthrie	1	1893-94
Frank M. Shamburger	4	1894-98
Jesse H. Page	1	1898-99
L. S. Massey	4	1899-03
R. A. Willis	4	1903-07
N. H. D. Wilson, D. D.	3	1907-10
H. A. Humble	3	1910-13
R. F. Bumpas	4	1913-17
E. H. Davis	2	1917-19
W. A. Cade	2	1919-21
W. R. Royal	4	1921-25
T. G. Vickers	3	1925-28
C. M. Hawkins, D. D.,	3	1928-31
M. Y. Self	5	1931-36
H. L. Hendricks	4	1936-40
Hiram K. King		1940-

March, 1942.

